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✓ LAWMAKERS WELCOME GATES' APPOINTMENT AS CASEY SU  
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WASHINGTON

President Reagan's choice of CIA veteran Robert Gates to replace ailing William Casey as the spy agency's director won widespread congressional support Monday, but one senator questioned whether he had provided timely information about the Iran-Contra affair. STAT

✓ Gen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said he is concerned Gates may have ignored promises he made when he was confirmed last April as CIA deputy director that he would inform Congress without delay if he learned the agency was involved in possible wrongdoing.

Leahy, who until last year was vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said it is clear from testimony taken so far that Gates knew that at least one CIA employee helped Lt. Col. Oliver North facilitate the Iranian arms transactions.

"And if he knew that, when did he know about it" and why did he not immediately inform the congressional oversight committees? Leahy asked.

Leahy said he was unable to ask those questions of Casey because the investigative process was interrupted by the director's surgery for removal of a cancerous brain tumor, a condition that led to his resignation Monday.

Meanwhile, Senate Democratic Leader Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia said he wouldn't be surprised if Gates' confirmation hearings were used as a forum to focus attention on CIA operations, the congressional oversight process and the extent of CIA involvement in the Iran arms sales.

Several House and Senate members said that Casey was instrumental in improving CIA morale and in providing increased funding for the spy agency. But they faulted him for what they called a lack of candor with Congress and for fostering what they said was an atmosphere of mutual distrust.

Some said they have been told that though Casey is mentally alert, he has difficulty speaking.

Sen. Howell Heflin, D-Ala., said any further questioning of Casey on the Iran affair will depend on "whether he is competent to testify, whether his memory has been impaired." Many lawmakers said it is clear that Gates has the credentials and experience to head the CIA, and they predicted that, barring surprises, he will easily be confirmed.

✓ At the State Department, Secretary of State George P. Shultz said of Casey: "His contributions to strengthening the capabilities of the U.S. intelligence community have significantly assisted this administration's efforts to improve our national security posture." Shultz said he has worked closely with Gates and called him a worthy successor, "a genuine professional with deep knowledge of all aspects of the intelligence community." "It won't be easy replacing Bill Casey, nor is this the easiest of times for anyone to be stepping into the top slot at the CIA," said Senate Republican leader Bob Dole of Kansas. "But I am confident Robert Gates is up to the challenge." Dole said the Senate should make Gates' confirmation a top priority "given the importance of stability and continuity at this crucial national security post." Sen. David Doren, D-Okla.,

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chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he and Gates have the "common goal" of making sure the committee and the CIA "will be able to share information and ideas on a completely candid basis." Many lawmakers said the most important job Gates will have is the restoration of trust between the agency and Congress.

Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, vice chairman of the Senate panel, said Gates is well qualified for the job and will be able to move into it without the break-in period an outside nominee would have required.

Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Casey had done "the right thing" by resigning now because of his medical problems, and he joined others in describing Gates as an able professional.

Rep. Dave McCurdy, D-Okla., a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said that in contrast to Casey, Gates will be seen as "a breath of fresh air." "He will be a clear and objective reporter of information to the president," McCurdy said. "I don't think he'll be an advocate of a particular position, which I think sometimes director Casey was." Under Casey, McCurdy said, there were "tremendous gaps" between the agency and Congress with Casey appearing to resent having to explain and justify administration activities.

Rep. Larry Smith, D-Fla., said he was "frankly happy" that Casey had resigned because that step was "in the national interest." "It turns out that the CIA was much more deeply involved in this whole arms transaction than they previously admitted to us," Smith said.

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, called Gates "an excellent choice" and said of Casey: "While we did not always agree, I respected him."